

## BPAC Statement Regarding “Make Eye Contact” Signs

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission requests that the Nashville Department of Transportation remove all existing “Look! Make eye contact before crossing” signs and immediately cease installation of these signs going forward.

We appreciate the concerns raised at our September 15th, 2025 commission meeting regarding these signs and agree that they should no longer be used. These signs send a dangerous and misleading message that places the burden of safety on those who are the most vulnerable, rather than those who are causing harm. This approach normalizes victim blaming by suggesting that pedestrians are responsible for their own deaths. This is antithetical to our modal hierarchy and to the goals of Vision Zero. Furthermore, these signs imply a legal responsibility that does not exist but very well may create liability for a pedestrian victim in the event of a crash.

The instruction to “make eye contact” is not only ineffective, it is impossible in many situations, including when drivers are distracted, traveling at excessive speeds, or have tinted windows. This messaging also discriminates against children, people with visual impairment, and people with disabilities. Additional research shows that even at speeds of 25 mph, people cannot determine the gaze of a driver at 15m and cannot see the driver at all at 30m, meaning that in almost all situations, pedestrians must start to cross without even having the opportunity to make eye contact (AlAdawy et al, 2019).

On a larger scale, studies show that that focusing on pedestrian behavior is ineffective and detracts from infrastructure changes and policies that actually do improve safety (Ralph and Girardeau, 2020). This is inconsistent with the Vision Zero systems-based approach to make streets safe for everyone and places the most vulnerable road users, including children, seniors, and those with disabilities, at even higher risk.

We ask that NDOT provide a report at the next BPAC meeting on November 17th, 2025 that includes (1) a current list of all locations of “Make Eye Contact” signs, (2) a timeline for these signs’ removal, and (3) identification of at least one evidence-based infrastructure change that can be implemented at each location in place of these signs that will reduce the risk of pedestrian injuries and fatalities, including raised crosswalks, leading pedestrian intervals, speed limit reductions, traffic calming measures, eliminating right turn on red, crosswalk and lighting improvements, and/or new stop signs or signals.

Approved by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission on October 20, 2025.

Katherine McDonell, Chair

Matthew Hertz, Vice Chair

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Alvin Haney

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Anas Saba

Courtney Ross

John Norris

A copy of this statement is to be forwarded to:

Diana Alarcon, Director, Nashville Department of Transportation

Mayor Freddie O'Connell

Vice Mayor Angie Henderson

Members of the Metropolitan Council

#### References:

AlAdawy, D., Glazer, M., Terwilliger, J., Schmidt, H., Domeyer, J., Mehler, B., Reimer, B. & Fridman, L., (2019) "Eye Contact between Pedestrians and Drivers", Driving Assessment Conference 10(2019), 301-307. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17077/drivingassessment.1710>

Ralph K., Girardeau I. (2020) Distracted by "distracted pedestrians?" Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Volume 5, 100118, ISSN 2590-1982. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2020.100118>